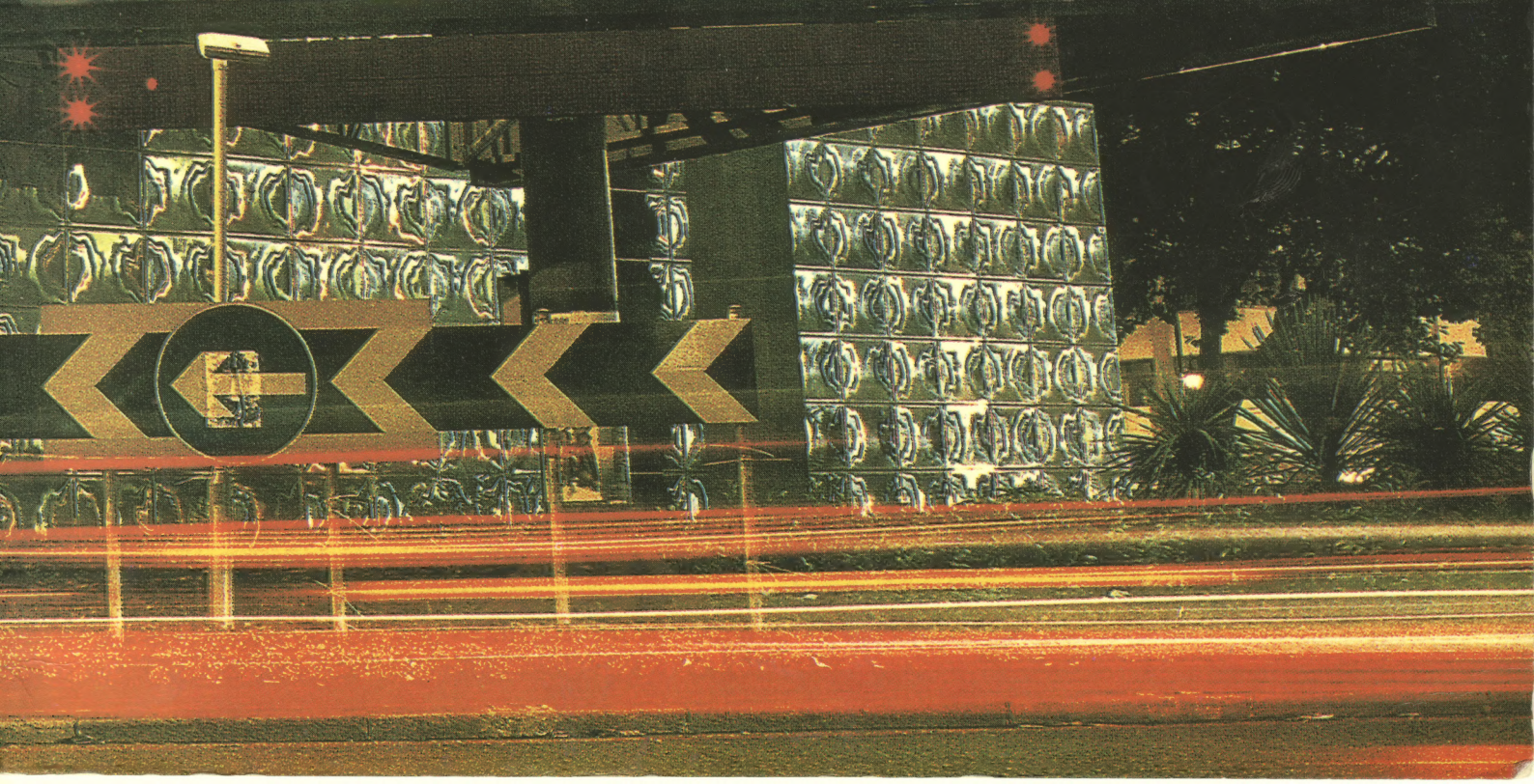


RADIOHEAD TOUR 2000



The new Radiohead album, *Kid A*, was finished four-and-a-half months ago. Having almost split up in February after arguments about the track-listing, the five members managed to agree on a 10 song running order in April, and immediately began rehearsing for a short European tour in June and July – their first sequence of dates since the spring of '98.

"Certain people within the group wanted to play some live concerts," explains bassist Colin Greenwood, not sounding like he was one of them, "which I suppose dictated the curtailment of the recording as much as anything." Sitting at the kitchen table in his Oxford home, Greenwood looks pretty curtailed himself. He seems to be struggling to maintain eloquence without nodding off into his mug of tea or rubbing his buggered-looking eyes out.

He reaches for a pen and some paper. Placing the paper on a copy of *Private Eye*, he draws a sketch of the 10,000 capacity tent in which Radiohead will be performing their UK gigs in September and October. Designed for excellent sound, the tent has already made headlines for a different reason: it will be a "logo-free" environment as no corporate advertising is permitted. "It looks a bit like a pair of shorts," says Greenwood, sketching away. "We're here... The audience are sort of here... Where the crotch is, that's the mixing desk..." The issue of *Private Eye* has a paragraph written about Radiohead's comeback by a *Times* journalist. It's in Pseudos Corner.

In the kitchen of his own house further along the same street, guitarist Ed O'Brien stiffens in mock-alarm. He is trying to illustrate the physical and mental strain of Radiohead's world tour of 1997-98 – a year of sustained media scrutiny. "What we've had is a series of scenarios that we've been in before," O'Brien says of the recent European shows, "and you suddenly feel yourself getting tense. You're like, Uh-oh, we're entering OK Computer territory. We're not comfortable with this..."

Later that evening, in a pub on the other side of Oxford, Thom Yorke will claim that *Meeting People Is Easy* (the fly-on-the-wall documentary of the OK Computer tour) is a 94-minute message to any younger bands who might envy Radiohead's high-flying lifestyle. And that message is: "Don't even think about it." Ed O'Brien's abiding tour-memory is of "huge fluctuations in emotion" that turned him into "a sort of non-human". The Radiohead website is still receiving hate mail from Americans and Europeans who caught Yorke on his wrong side – ie. either side – and were told to get fucked.

All these scenes, of course, are grist to the mill of Radiohead's detractors, who regard the group as pampered moaners who want to have their cake and eat it. Who want to make brilliant music but not be acclaimed for it. Who want to reach plenty of listeners but not have to talk to any of them. Who want to be important but not that important.

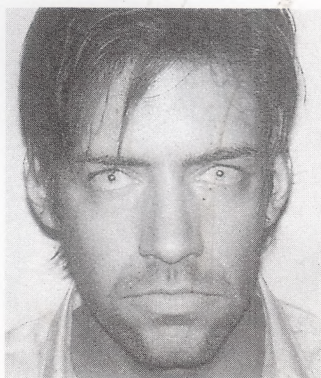
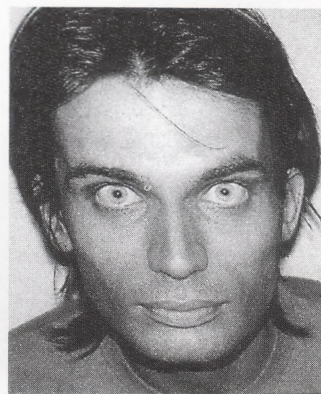
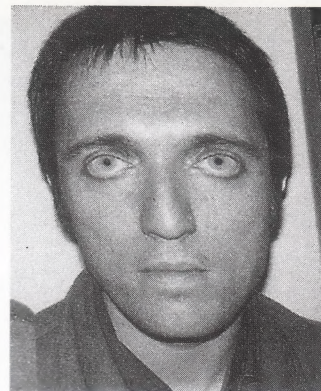
In actual fact, Colin Greenwood confides that the OK Computer tour was not all ghastly, and that once the film-makers had gone the band had a pleasant time swimming in New Zealand and go-karting in Australia. Then again, Greenwood is adamant that the cycle of album-tour-then-another-album became just too ruinous for Radiohead in the late '90s, which is why they are drawing a line under OK Computer and all the pressure that went with it. Or why they're trying to, at any rate.

EVEN BEFORE Q readers voted it the greatest album of all time in February 1998, it was apparent that OK Computer had made an extraordinary impact on the cultural landscape. Aside from being a tremendously stimulating and evocative listen, it was an encapsulation of what it's like to feel terrified by the times. In the last decade of British music, it has tended to be the cheerful records that have defined the age (it's no coincidence that Radiohead released only an EP in '94, the first year of Britpop), yet OK Computer, a work of infinite anguish, put the emphasis on hard-hitting pessimism and had the chillingly plausible flourish of Chris Morris's TV mind-warps, Martin Amis's nuclear weapons essays, the late Bill Hicks's Gulf War routines and all the apocalyptic classics in the rock'n'roll pantheon. The remarkable thing is not that Q readers endorsed a seven-month-old album as the most gripping record in 40 years of popular music history. The remarkable thing is that they may have been right.

When something is that good, it becomes a kind of celebration. Anyone catching the OK Computer tour would have been struck by the party atmosphere in the stalls as Radiohead played their complex elegies in half-lit reverie. For the oldsters upstairs, on the other hand, this was music for the head; a hush descended on the dress circle as though an Ibsen or Beckett drama was being acted out. Some of these people must have seen R.E.M. in the '80s and recognised in them what they now recognised in Radiohead: a band that makes the music that non-musicians would want to make if they were in a band.

Since the release of OK Computer, Radiohead have been described as the Best Band In The World so often that it has come to represent for them little more than a familiar configuration of words. The widespread assumption is that *Kid A* will not only better OK Computer but find new places for rock music to go – though this is dismissed by Yorke with fantastic peremptoriness as "just a load of wank". It should be remembered that these five men didn't start out popular and rise incrementally. Even when their 1995 album *The Bends* had won them 1.5 million new admirers, a writer in *Rock: The Rough Guide* pointed out that "Radiohead have always had a big hang-up about being undervalued".

It makes a weird sort of sense, therefore, that they should have just as big a hang-up about being overvalued. Not many people would think of writing a song like *How To Disappear Completely* (the fourth track on *Kid A*), in which Yorke reveals his feelings of disorientation and woe when Radiohead played to 38,000 people at the RDS in Dublin on June 21





The brothers Greenwood in action;
Oxford, early 1992.



Radiohead at the Jericho Tavern,
the spiritual home of Oxford music.

RADIOHEAD 2000



Thom Yorke, Tivoli, Barcelona, 15 June 2000: "I wanna tell you a story..."

1997 – the biggest gig they'd ever done. And not many bands would look forward to a day when their records created less of a fuss, and weren't so rhapsodised about, as Radiohead now seem to.

"We happen to live in an age," Ed O'Brien sighs, "where recorded music is distributed throughout the world and bands are held up to be almost super-human. It's not a very healthy thing." Speaking to Q one by one today, Radiohead go out of their way to stress how fallible they are; how the making of Kid A nearly proved their downfall; how laughable they find their world-beaters' reputation. O'Brien believes that a backlash against the band is due any minute. And in a month when Warner Bros are spending £1 million on marketing the new Madonna album, Radiohead are playing quixotically hard-to-get, releasing no singles to promote Kid A and refusing to pronounce it their best work. Ironically, it is probably their best work.

Kid A is 48 minutes long, stunningly beautiful, frequently bizarre and wholly engrossing. It begins with a fabulous electric piano song played by Yorke, follows that with the oddest Radiohead track ever, veers off into something even odder, brings you back with the loveliest orchestrated ballad in years, wanders away on some unexplained errand for a while, returns with two guitar songs as uncanny as they are exceptional, goes suddenly very dark and inhospitable for about five minutes, reaches out for you as though nothing had happened and eventually bids farewell in a halo of harps and choirs. There has never been an album like it. If 12 million people buy it and are transported, have a heart for the poor saps who decided not to bother.

To be released on 2 October, Kid A will be the last Radiohead album, they say, in the dreaded "cycle". This will apparently be good news for fans, since it will mean more releases and gigs, with fewer delays between them. With the support of their long-time label Parlophone, they hope to begin issuing their music in a more open-ended manner. "We'd really like to have more regular communications with people," explains Colin Greenwood, "as opposed to just having this massive dump every two-and-a-half years, and fanfares and clarion calls." Ideas currently being examined include intermittent EPs and pay-as-you-go Internet serialisations. "We're trying to get away from the

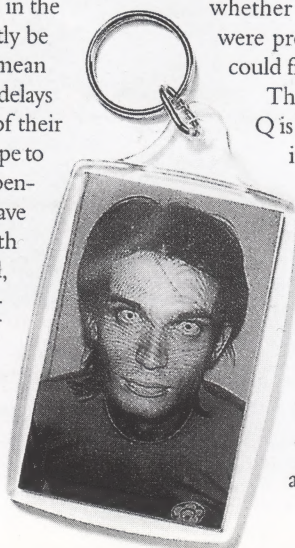
situation where every record we make is the be-all and end-all," asserts O'Brien.

The new Radiohead buzzword is "enjoyable". They say it a lot, usually prefacing it with something like "what we want to do is make the recording process more...", or "what we've got to find is a way to make touring more..." In his own quest for enjoyment, Thom Yorke found it helpful to go home, close the door and smash his tape of Kid A to bits.

The first Radiohead member to meet Q is Phil Selway, the gentle and courteous drummer, who leads the way from Oxford railway station to a quiet coffee house nearby. Selway is so understated that he has to put on a funny voice to talk about OK Computer's 4.5 million sales and lavish critical reception. "I suppose it was *quite well-received*," he says in his strange voice, "but we did wonder if it might have turned us into a one-trick band." Like his colleagues, Selway now sees OK Computer as overrated and several minutes too long.

Many of the qualities of OK Computer – particularly the amazing guitar sounds and the masterful use of dynamics – are absent from Kid A. Also absent from some of the songs are certain members of Radiohead themselves. It was an album made in an entirely unfamiliar fashion: no time-constraints; very little pre-written material; a great deal of bewilderment and fear. "In terms of the relationship between the five of us, everything was up for grabs last year," Selway reckons. "It was a case of trying to see what different musical approaches there were – whether they were appropriate, whether we were prepared to do them and whether we could find something that we all agreed on."

The final member of Radiohead to meet Q is Thom Yorke, who walks into the pub in a rather foul mood and orders a pint of bitter. With Blue Note jazz and Django Reinhardt playing in the background, he slowly unwinds over the course of three or four ales and ends up staying till closing time. By then the pub has filled with young drinkers, but none give Yorke so much as a glance. "No, they're all much too cool," he says, adding icily, "Right now everyone's off my back – and I'd like it to stay that way."





21 Yorke seemingly had an awful time making *Kid A*. All the same, O'Brien insists that its musical leaps-in-the-dark and discoveries of new frontiers were made possible only by Yorke's doggedness.

"Thom drove the album, more so than any other album," says O'Brien. "It was an eye-opener for me. He has a great art-school ethic. He did art at university and he has that kind of drive: OK, I've done that. Now I'm going to move on. I think I can be vaguely objective about this, and I think Thom is in the line of the John Lennons, the David Bowies, part of that heritage. He has an incredible gift."

Yorke is not the leader of Radiohead as such, but he is credited as being their prime motivator and ideas man. O'Brien: "You look at Thom – he's always moving, he's very fast. He's got incredible physique and brain." In a Radiohead dispute, Yorke will often win. ("We operate like the UN," he suggests, "and I'm America.") From day one, he has written nearly all of Radiohead's material. Even on *OK Computer*, which sounded like democracy in action, what was actually happening was a well-rehearsed band playing Yorke-written songs until they arrived at the optimum performance.

When Radiohead started recording the new

the effects, have really nice-sounding guitars and do something really snappy."

It says something about the internal workings of Radiohead that not only did Yorke not share O'Brien's vision of the album, he didn't even know about it until a few seconds ago.

"That explains a lot," Yorke laughs. "Fucking hell, there was no chance of the album sounding like that. I'd completely had it with melody. I just wanted rhythm. All melodies to me were pure embarrassment."

Electing to downplay some of his uncertainties with such an important record at stake, Yorke felt it better not to tell the others that he had no desire to sing either...



fter listening to Yorke's Autechre and Aphex Twin records for a while, Radiohead started the Paris sessions with a song that had emerged in a soundcheck in New York the previous April. Its working title was rather apt: *Lost At Sea*. "We soon became gridlocked," remembers Phil Selway. "Paris was very much a case of tripping ourselves up." *Lost At Sea* was duly put to one side and forgotten.

"I'd completely had it with melody. I just wanted rhythm. All melodies to me were pure embarrassment."

Thom Yorke

album in Paris in January 1999, however, it was clear that Yorke had virtually nothing prepared. He had, in fact, been hit by a grave attack of writer's block.

"New Year's Eve '98 was one of the lowest points of my life," he recalls. "I felt like I was going fucking crazy. Every time I picked up a guitar I just got the horrors. I would start writing a song, stop after 16 bars, hide it away in a drawer, look at it again, tear it up, destroy it... I was sinking down and down."

Among the things eating into Yorke's confidence was his worry that Radiohead were not the pioneering band they were cracked up to be. As a student in Exeter in the early '90s, he loved the risk-taking techno of the Sheffield-based Warp label. Trying to find his bearings on returning home from the *OK Computer* tour, Yorke listened back to the Warp artists Autechre and the Aphex Twin, and grew convinced that they had pushed music forward while Radiohead had only nudged it sideways.

"I thought we had missed the point," he says sadly. "The first thing I did after the tour was buy the whole Warp back catalogue. I started listening to John Peel and ordering records off the Net. It was refreshing because the music was all structures and had no human voices in it. But I felt just as emotional about it as I'd ever felt about guitar music."

During rehearsals at the end of 1998, Ed O'Brien had had a brainwave about the new Radiohead album. He felt it should be full of concise, three-minute guitar songs, each one skilfully arranged and packed with wonderful melodies. "I was fed up with all the prog-rock analogies," he comments, "particularly because I hate all that music anyway. I thought the only way that we could do the antithesis to *OK Computer* was to get rid of all

In March, the band moved to a studio in Copenhagen and started recording whatever fragments of songs were available. "Copenhagen was two weeks of us having a pretty horrendous time," says O'Brien with a wince. "At the end of it we had about 50 reels of two-inch tape, and on each of those tapes was 15 minutes of music. And nothing was finished."

Partly because Yorke was unable to complete any songs, and partly because he'd had a Warp revival, he would sometimes bring demos to the studio that contained only a programmed drum sequence or an interesting sound. Perfectly legitimate procedure if you happen to be Massive Attack, but a bit of a head-scratcher for a three-guitar band like Radiohead. And since few of the songs that evolved from Yorke's demos had distinct verses or choruses, it was hard to work out basic arrangements, hard to see where the guitars should go, and hard for the musicians to know whether they were making headway or wasting their time.

Yorke: "It was about generating bits of work that may be incomplete and may not be going anywhere. And by the time you finish it, it may be unrecognisable. But it might be far better than what you started with. That's what I hoped we were trying to do – regardless of where the music was coming from, and regardless of which members of the band were involved."

The logic of this approach percolated gradually down to everyone else. O'Brien, who admits to being bamboozled by the recording practices for the best part of a year, can just about see the wisdom of them now.

"If you're going to make a different-sounding



Bank Underground Station, EC2, 10 August 2000. Yorke: "I'd like to see them put these pictures on a poster."

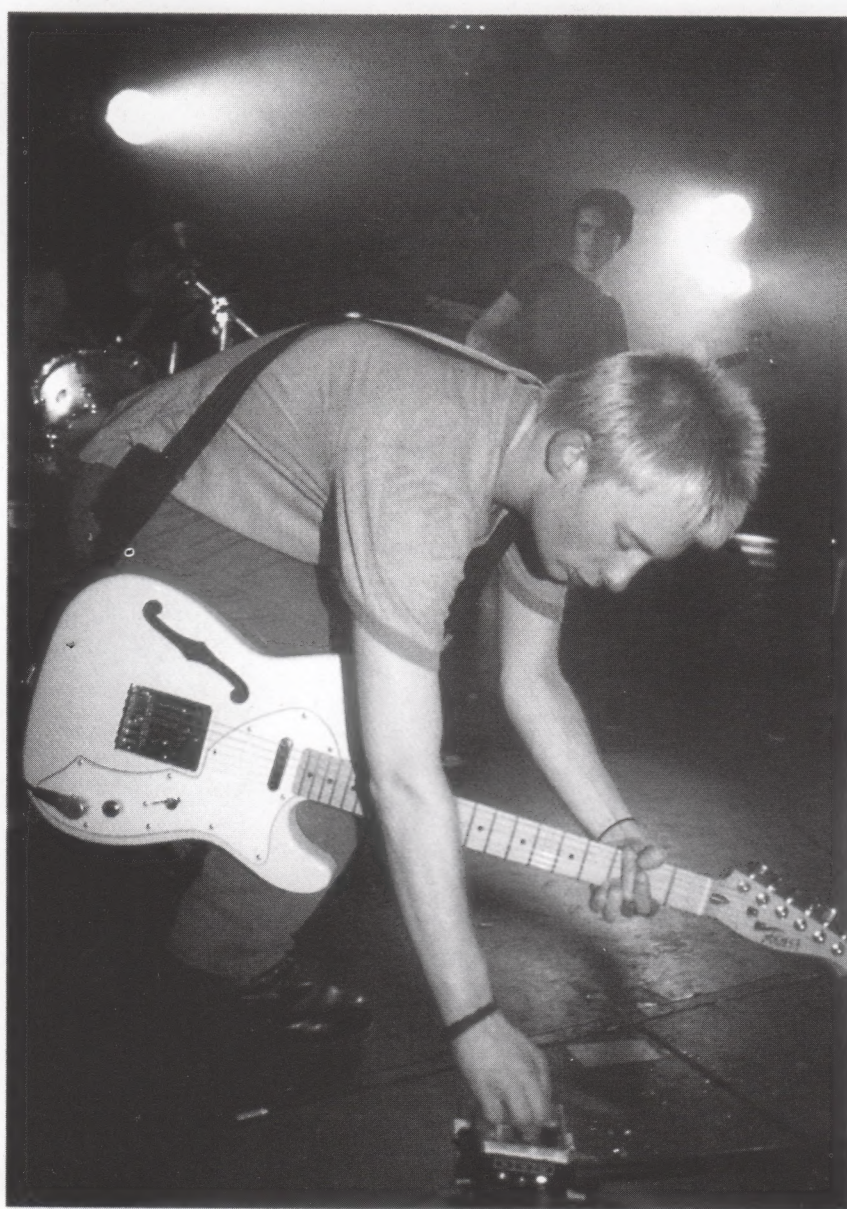
Thanks to Kate Blow at the London Transport Press Office

record," he says, "you have to change the methodology. And it's scary – everyone feels insecure. I'm a guitarist and suddenly it's like, Well, there are no guitars on this track, or no drums. Jonny, me, Coz and Phil had to get our heads round that. It was a test of the band, I think. Would we survive with our egos intact?"

For O'Brien, it meant a complete rethink: he would hardly touch a guitar in 1999. Selway, too, wondered if he had a valid contribution to make to Radiohead's music any more. Colin Greenwood



Above: Another early Jericho Tavern set, another lacklustre sartorial performance.



Left: Thom adjusts himself onstage. Live at the Garage, Glasgow, in 1994.



**"What we've done
is split the band
up and reform it
with the same
five members."**

Ed O'Brien

concedes the album didn't start to take shape for him until earlier this year. As for Greenwood's brother Jonny, the lead guitarist once described as "a chronic upstager", he is thoroughly low-key on *Kid A* and plays guitar on only a couple of tracks.

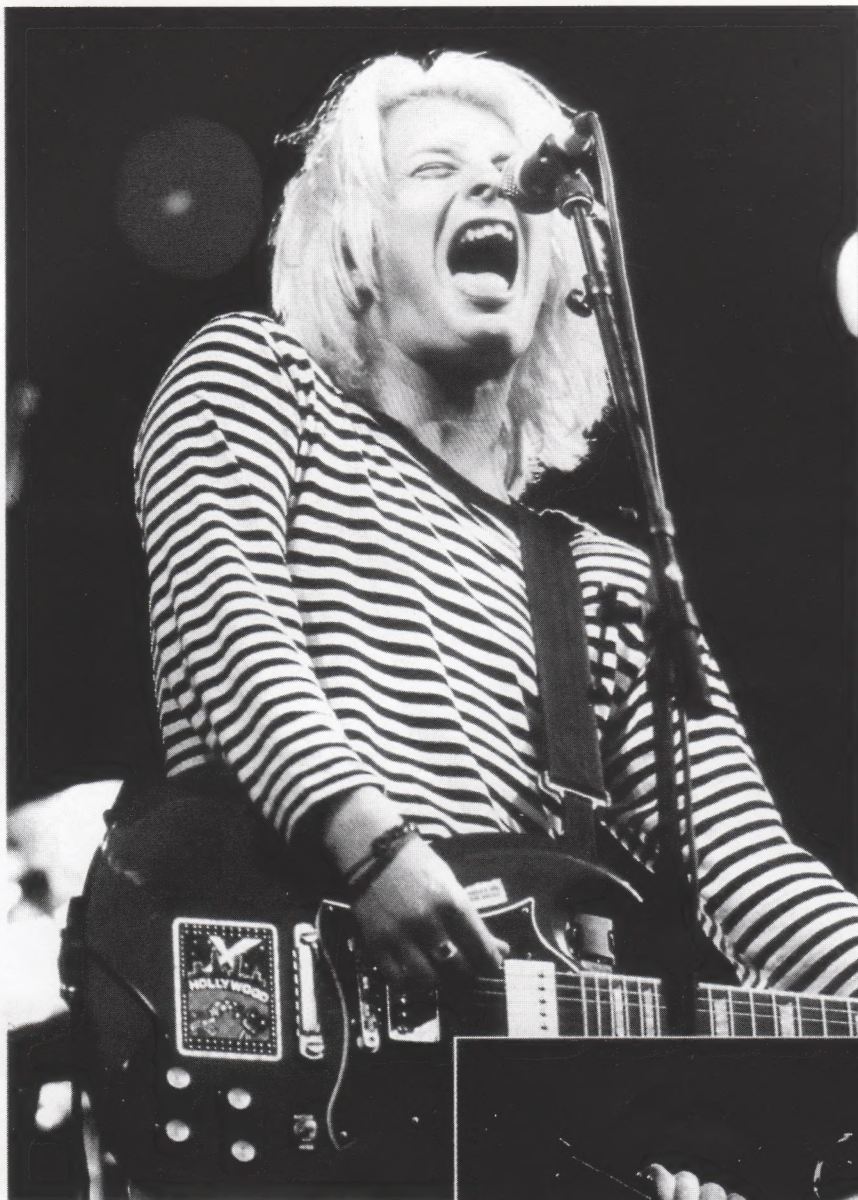
"I think, if this doesn't sound too corporate, that Radiohead is a big badge that we hide behind," says Jonny over a tea-time beer in the same pub that Yorke will later spend the evening. "Radiohead is something that we push forward instead of ourselves... And also I sometimes feel like there's a

sixth member of the band sitting listening to what we're doing, and every time we've done something he shouts, Bored now!"

OR PERHAPS it's the 28-year-old Greenwood himself who shouts it. The band's youngest member, Jonny is also by his own admission the most impatient. He laments the amount of time *Kid A* took to make, guessing that Radiohead would release four albums a year if he were in charge. Happy to adapt to the new methodology – although

far from in tune with Yorke's Warp fixation – Greenwood had none of O'Brien's reservations about making a largely guitar-free album, but had definite concerns that the album might appear too gratuitous a move towards electronica and random digital experimentation.

In the event, the instrument that Greenwood plays most on *Kid A* predates the digital computer. A combination of a keyboard, a ribbon and a ring, the Ondes Martenot is featured in the work of the French composer Messiaen, and can also be



'There is irony, there's implied irony, and there was my hair.' Thankfully, the Los Angeles influence never extended beyond Thom's mullet.



Thom, still wearing entrance bracelet, at the Lowlands Festival in Holland in August 1995.



Above: Drummer Phil 'Mad Dog' Selway, as unflinchingly photogenic as ever.

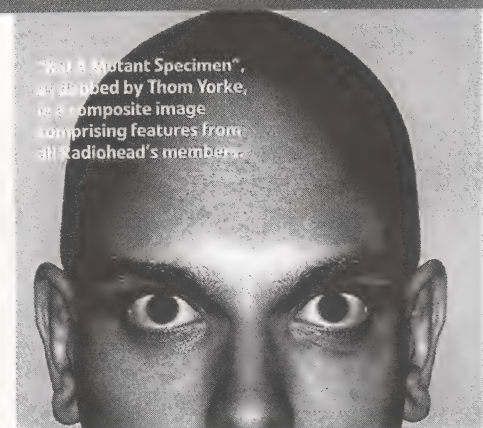


Left: Colin Greenwood, Phil's rhythm partner, as usual hiding his light under a bushel, or a Marshall stack at least.

heard in the Star Trek theme, where it sounds like a woman singing. Greenwood has been obsessed with the possibilities of the instrument since studying Messiaen as a schoolboy.

But Radiohead's new methodology wasn't simply a case of pointing Greenwood at his Ondes Martenot and hoping for the best. "Paris and Copenhagen were pretty much wash-outs," he feels. "We did quite a lot of stuff and then spent a year

KID A TRACK-BY-TRACK



"Wall & Mutant Specimen", as dubbed by Thom Yorke, is a composite image comprising features from all Radiohead's members.

Everything In Its Right Place

A gorgeous, keyboard-led opener. Thom Yorke sings outlandish phrases ("Yesterday I woke up sucking a lemon") while Jonny Greenwood cuts up Yorke's voice and builds backing vocals out of it. Et voilà – Thom & The Yorkettes!

Kid A

Bloody strange. Nightmarish ambience. Jonny on Ondes Martenot, raindrop keyboards and a heavily-disguised Yorke pulling words out of a hat. Let's see Muse try to do this.

The National Anthem

Swamp-rock blackout with fuzz bass, drums and two Ondes Martenots woo-oo-ing spookily. Halfway through, it dissolves into a cacophony of trombones and saxophones inspired by the jazz giant Charles Mingus.

How To Disappear Completely

Perambulating bass and keening guitars (at last!) help this fantastic ballad to breathe and grow, until Yorke's faraway vocal and Jonny's sublime orchestral arrangement take it to a euphoric climax.

Treefingers

An instrumental. Yorke makes Eno-esque mood music out of a sample of Ed O'Brien's guitar. The listener floats around the room in sheer bliss. Edited down from about 10 minutes.

Optimistic

The guitars come out again as Radiohead play "live". Excellent choppy feel, splashing drums and a mad falsetto Yorke raging about fish, dinosaurs and Animal Farm. Will go down as one of the great Radiohead tracks.

In Limbo

First song to be recorded (under the title *Lost At Sea*), it juxtaposes Jonny's arpeggiated guitar and a brooding backing track in a different time signature. Mystifying to outsiders, but reminds Yorke of The Police.

Idioteque

Dense, hell-on-earth disco. Yorke cuts up sections of a 20-minute synthesizer sample made by Jonny. Loads of rhythm, percussion and intensity. Yorke's favourite song.

Morning Bell

Back to melody and sweet bass-playing. Yorke pleads "release me" and "where'd you park the car?" as drummer Selway pats away imaginatively in 5/4. Sparse but fraught – like Kid A as a whole.

Motion Picture Soundtrack

Very old song from the early '90s. Mournful pump organ is joined by a choir and sampled harp for a swelling finale that puts Yorke in mind of Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah from Disney's *Song Of The South*. Followed by an untitled, 50-second instrumental.

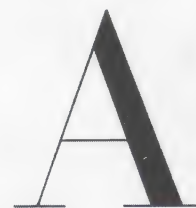
David Cavanagh

hating it. And then ended up using bits of it, or even quite a lot of it. It was so typical of us." Dozens of tracks were started and abandoned, only to be reassessed and polished off anything up to six months later. One song, *Knives Out*, took 373 days to complete and still doesn't appear on the album.

When the band moved their equipment into an empty Gloucestershire mansion, Batsford Park, in April 1999, nobody – least of all Yorke – had any concept of a schedule or plan of action. "When we went into Batsford, there was a board," recalls O'Brien, "and I think Thom enjoyed the perverse delight of writing up the titles of 50 or 60-odd songs. Some of them were just doodles. Others were song ideas that he hadn't played us. You kept on looking at this board..." Selway remembers being "frightened" by it.

The lack of a deadline from label Parlophone was beginning to look like a double-edged sword. O'Brien: "It was almost like brain overload. Human beings need a sense of order to what we can handle. If there are too many unfinished things, where do you focus? If you've got 30 or 40 things started and you've made no decisions on any of them, it causes you to kneejerk and panic at times. We had several crisis meetings."

And out of those meetings came an understanding that if Radiohead couldn't record an album worth releasing, they would admit defeat and go their separate ways.



Yorke found confidence, only to lose it straight away, he half-hoped that another member of the band, or their co-producer Nigel Godrich, might seize the reins. All eyes, however, were looking to Yorke. "It was a learning curve for everybody," he says. "It wasn't like I was standing there waiting for everybody to catch up."

The reason why Radiohead had recorded in Paris, Copenhagen and Gloucestershire was because their own studio, which they had expected to be ready by the start of 1999, was still being fitted out and would not be fully operational until September. Yorke imagined Radiohead using their studio much as Can had used their Cologne fortress in the '70s: to record every minute of music played, editing the best stuff down to album length. But Can had been geniuses at improvising. Were Radiohead?

That summer, much to the interest of the music papers, O'Brien began posting a diary of the album on the band's website. Soon his progress updates and descriptions of songs started to appear as news stories in the press. This was not viewed by Radiohead as an irritation, nor as a threat to their privacy, but as a splendid means of letting the outside world see in. Now that the public had access to what they were doing, the album seemed less like some secretive science-lab Project X and more like an accountable endeavour given to everyday foibles and human error.

"There was very little played but a lot of talk," read one early O'Brien entry. "The problem is that we are essentially in limbo. For the first time... we have nothing to get ready for, except 'an album', but we've been working on that since January and nothing substantial has come of it, except maybe a few harsh lessons in how not to do things... Are we going down Stone Roses territory?"

But as they groped for consensus, an important consideration came into play. Although Radiohead were only three albums into their career, the musicians had been playing together for almost 15 years – and had known each other for nearly 20. Yorke was not the only one to worry that they might have reached the end of the line. "We had a lot of growing up to do," he mutters.

The critical moment, as Yorke sees it, was when everyone accepted that they wouldn't appear on every song. "It got the point where it was like, Now we've *really* got to sort this out," he says. "It was so that everybody felt comfortable, including myself. But it took a long time to sort it." The upshot was that some members of Radiohead had to learn, as O'Brien puts it, "how to be a participant in a song without actually playing a note".

IN ONE OF his diary entries earlier this year, O'Brien urged Radiohead fans to buy *No Logo*, a book by the Canadian journalist Naomi Klein. A brilliant analysis of the branding of planet Earth by Nike, McDonald's, Starbucks, MTV and others – and of the activists around the world who are trying to throw spanners in the works – *No Logo* was read by three members of the band and was even rumoured to be a potential title for the new album.

"No Logo gave one real hope," says O'Brien. "It certainly made me feel less alone. I must admit I'm deeply pessimistic about humanity, and she was writing everything that I was trying to make sense of in my head. It was very uplifting."

O'Brien had visited India a few years before and been thrilled to see the children of a tiny village gathered around a television watching the video of Radiohead's *Lucky* on MTV. His heart sank, however, when it was followed by an ad for Nike, and he realised that Radiohead's video was just another pixel on the display screen of worldwide product placement. Whilst Thom Yorke is Radiohead's most visibly politicised member, supporting Free Tibet, Drop The Debt and a host of other movements besides, O'Brien is the one who found himself on the recent anti-World Trade Organisation march in Whitehall – his first demo since his student days – and who confesses to wishing the band could be more "useful".

But here's the dichotomy. Logo-free tents or not, Radiohead are bound by contract to the vast global entertainment conglomerate EMI/Time Warner/AOL, and their records do battle with Britney Spears and her fellow synergised icons in the market-place. Yorke had some petulant fun with this dichotomy in the sleeve copy for *OK Computer* ("All songs are published by Warner Chappell Ltd. Lyrics used by kind permission even though we wrote them"), but *No Logo* presents many an example of a cutting-edge musician being sarcastic about the big machine, and is scathing about all of them. "Where do you have the guts to draw the borders around your brand?" Naomi Klein writes. And is that what Radiohead are now starting to do?

But if O'Brien, a paradoxically laidback worrier whose favourite band is Asian Dub Foundation, would like to see a more political Radiohead, the fact is that Yorke is anything but a polemicist. Neither, especially media-friendly nor comfortable in the spotlight, Yorke personifies the angry intelligence and awkwardness of Radiohead's music. Intensely wary of being patronised or co-opted, he bats away Q's questions about *No Logo* and shrugs

Right: Ed O'Brien, Radiohead's rhythm guitarist, diplomat and sex symbol.

Below: Jonny Greenwood, the most inventive guitarist of his generation. Note presence of fabled armguard.





"We live in an age where bands are held up to be almost superhuman. It's not a very healthy thing."

Ed O'Brien

that the book didn't teach him anything he didn't already know. While it's tempting to see Radiohead's determination to break the cycle as an ethical decision – a willingness to undersell their brand by removing the enormous promotional opportunities that attend long-awaited masterpieces and year-long supertours – none of this cuts any ice with Yorke, who refuses to be drawn on Radiohead's long-term plans and is elliptical about the themes in his lyrics on *Kid A*.

For all that, there is one song on the album, *Optimistic*, which appears to go hand in hand with *No Logo*. In *Optimistic*, Yorke piles on violent images of "dinosaurs roaming the earth" and big fish eating little fish, offering the weary hand of friendship in the lines "you can try the best you can, you can try the best you can... the best you can is good enough". Sung without a hint of cynicism, it turns out to be a favourite saying of his girlfriend. "I can see the dinosaurs stepping over the mountains every time I sing that song," he says with a faraway look. "Monsters... out of control monsters roaming the earth. All-powerful, utterly invisible, wreaking destruction... Kalashnikovs... faceless, nameless..."

According to O'Brien, Yorke has changed his lyric-writing style on *Kid A*. For the first time, he has not explained the songs to the rest of the band – and won't be including the lyrics in the album's packaging. They sound more disconnected than ever, like the circular shorthand of David Bowie's *Low* or the menacing reiterations of early Mark E. Smith.

IN SEPTEMBER 1999 Radiohead finally moved into their own studio, still uncertain whether the previous nine months had been productive or not. By November, the song *Kid A* (whose title comes from a computer programme of children's voices) had been mixed and a list had been made of new songs to work on. When they broke for Christmas on 13 December, O'Brien's website diary calculated that six tracks were now finished.

Not that the end was necessarily in sight. Indeed they remained fearful about completing the album and suspected other methods of working might be worth exploring. On 10 January, following a suggestion by Nigel Godrich, the band split into two groups. One group worked in the studio's programming room, the other in the main room,

and the only rule was to avoid using any acoustic instruments such as guitars or drums. One group began by creating a basic sequence or loop or noise, handing it over for the others to expand on. Yorke thought the experiment might bring it home to Radiohead that "accidental" pieces were just as worthwhile as "proper" songs.

And with that, the new methodology suddenly made sense for Ed O'Brien. "You find yourself playing a Moog," he marvels, "or operating machinery that you've never used before. You're literally like a kid. 'I don't know this works, but God it makes great noise!' It was so fantastic to realise that that as valid as playing a really great riff on a guitar."

Although no music from that speculative session made it on to the album, O'Brien feels that Radiohead's foreseeable musical future was illuminated there and then. "Thom was encouraging and saying, Look – this stuff is *easy*," he recalls. "And he's right. With all the technology and software now available, you can take things and manipulate them in ways that you've never been able to do before. That's definitely something that we're going to go more and more into: taking guitars and cutting them up, making sounds that have never been..."



Above:
Radiohead
onstage at
Manchester's
Nynex Arena
on the 17th of
November 1997.



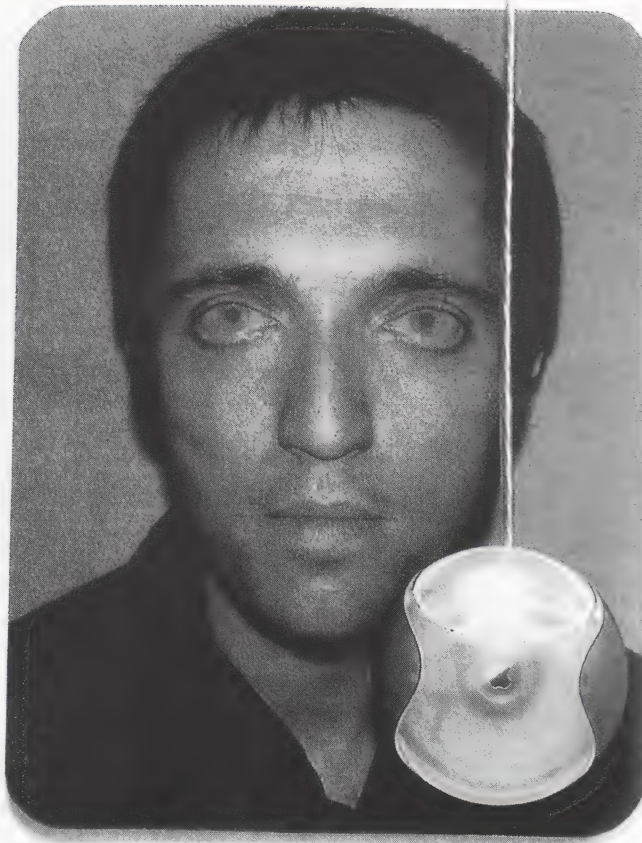
Left: 'Today, we
will mostly be
wearing black.'
Radiohead in
Amsterdam
in 1995.

made... Everything is wide open with the technology now. The permutations are endless. Completely and utterly endless."

The Greenwood brothers, however, are rather less upbeat on this subject. Jonny remembers the two-groups experiment as a crushing bore, while Colin seems to feel Radiohead are not out of the woods yet.

"The trick is to try and carry on doing things that interest you," he says, "but not turn into some awful art-rock nonsense for its own sake so that it looks like you're cutting your nose off to spite your face. For me, what I'd hope we end up being is like a West Coast group that does a record every year, or somebody like The Beta Band where the work is of very high quality and you have a bedrock of support and respect."

As for the other members of the group, Phil Selway, who became a father last year, inevitably has a mature outlook on how Radiohead's activities will need to change to accommodate their personal lives. Yorke has his own motives for hoping that the hysteria that followed him from continent to continent in 1997-98 will never be



tautic. We never talk about school. We were all at school together, but we never look back. We never talk about what we've done in the past."

ON 6 AUGUST 1999, O'Brien stood back from the troubled album and wrote in his diary: "It's taken us seven years to get this sort of freedom, and it's what we always wanted. But it could be so easy to fuck it all up." The fact that they have given birth to the exquisite Kid A after such a confusing and harrowing pregnancy suggests that few Radiohead crises are insurmountable. And by using their strong bargaining position to reappraise the way they make and promote their music, they are unquestionably well-placed to break their hated cycle. But the pressures that come with being the Best Band In The World are surely not theirs to turn off with a flick of a switch. When Q reminds O'Brien that R.E.M., too, thought their career would calm down after *Out Of Time*, and look what was round the corner, he laughs his head off and gives it no further thought.

But in a year when a Radiohead-influenced band like Coldplay enter the album charts at Number 1 and are talked of by some

"If you send out signals that you're not interested in the trappings of the world, people don't intrude on you."

Colin Greenwood

repeated. Only O'Brien is anything like excited about Radiohead projects to come.

"What we're going through at the moment – what we have to keep telling ourselves – is that we're embarking on a new route," he says. "We couldn't

have carried on like the way it was before. There was absolutely no point. It's a cliché, but what we've done is split the band up and reform it with the same five members... You know, I think one of the most important ethics of Radiohead is that we're not nos-

as the Second Coming, what price the First Cause? How can Radiohead be sure that the 4.5 million OK Computer fans will fall into step with the band's new decelerated pace?

"It's all about what kind of signals you send out," argues Colin Greenwood. "If you send out signals that you're not interested in the conventional trappings of the world that you inhabit, people don't intrude on you."

Thom Yorke might beg to differ. One line in the song *Morning Bell* was inspired by a letter delivered to Yorke's home saying that it was a pity Jeff Buckley had died and not him.

In time, Radiohead will be among the first bands of their stature to figure out the exact measurements of releasing music via the Net. Contracted to make six albums for terrestrial Parlophone, they are talking of releasing the fifth as early as next year. (If they do, it may comprise many or all of the 14 songs omitted from *Kid A*). After that, the widely predicted protocol of trickling songs on to the Net in batches of two, three and four will no doubt be the answer to some of Radiohead's prayers. There'll be no more of what Colin sardonically calls "aesthetic statements or manifestos". No more greatest-albums-of-all-time.

But if Radiohead are really to find the peace of mind they're looking for, the solution is a simple one. And until such time as they are able to implement it – by driving people away in their multitudes with disappointing records and insipid gigs; by deteriorating as a creative force – it's likely that Radiohead will continue to tower over modern music and be the band that everyone wants to crown with a garland of superlatives. ☐

WHAT ON EARTH ARE THOSE PICTURES ABOUT?

Thom Yorke explains Radiohead's self-image issue

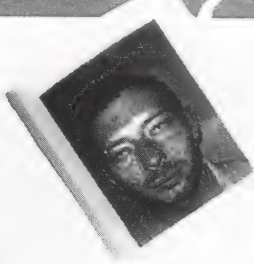
What are you trying to achieve with these photographs?

It's me and my mate Dan, basically. We've been messing about with this software for ages, making paintings in a sort of American hyper-realist style. Then it occurred to us – durr! – that the software was made for treating photographs and that we could be really having fun with pictures of ourselves. Initially, we were mirror imaging one side of our faces onto the other, but that looked a bit weird...

Why make yourselves look like this? I'm fed up of seeing my face everywhere. It got to the point where it didn't feel like I owned it. We're not interested in being celebrities, and others seemed to have different plans for us. I'd like to see them try to put these pictures on a poster [giggles].

What if "they" did put them on a poster? [Taken aback] Well, I wouldn't mind. It would be quite amusing.

So, in order to sabotage the *Kid A* marketing push, you've deliberately made yourself look hideous... [Surprised] Hideous? Do you think so? I think they're... interesting. Maybe I've stared at them for too long, they seem quite normal. Maybe my beard isn't very nice, but,



on the whole. I think you see more horrible things on a night out. I certainly have.

Maybe we should go on more nights out with Radiohead...

Maybe you should. Hee hee hee!

We showed the picture of Colin to an old friend of his and he jumped out of his skin. Really? Hee, hee, hee! Great.

You're doing no magazine photo shoots. What's so bad about them?

They're just so time-consuming. We could so easily be somewhere else, doing something else more pleasant than making money for IPC...

EMAP, actually. We're the marginally less evil ones.

Marginally! Hee, hee, hee! I quite like the idea of someone scanning the magazine shelves and seeing these pictures in between the tits and the bits of electronic gadgetry. This should freak them out.

What are your plans for the presentation of the band in the future?

We'd like to present ourselves in software form. You know, so you could take 3-D versions of the band and place us in a variety of contexts and environments. That would be fun. We wouldn't have to do anything then...

What about this weird composite Radiohead member?

That's Phil's head, obviously. Johnny's eyebrows, my nose and mouth. It's like a human mutation, not a comment on the GM thing as such, though you can't really ignore the GM issue. It's everywhere, innit?

So, are you taking the piss? Out of us? Out of the fans? Is it unreasonable for them to want to see you as you are?

Oh no, it's not like that at all. We're just... being creative.

Danny Eccleston



Left: Thom onstage at the Tibet Freedom Concert. 'Buddhism was really everything that was missing from my life.' That and a shave.

Below: A tense moment as Thom risks the displeasure of his bandmates by flirting with a smile.

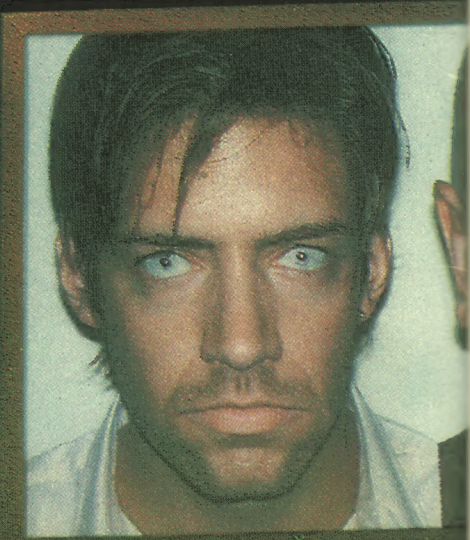




Left: Thom Yorke
in New York in
1996.

Below: 'Anyone
mentions bridge
again and we'll
****ing have you.'





PLEASE DO NOT
PARK HERE
ON MONDAY
JAN 11
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM
DOWNTOWN
CITY OF LOS ANGELES

